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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires were administered to 73 sophomore and senior high school students in 3 isolated rural Alaska towns (Adak, Unalaska, and Dillingham) to study the effects of socio-economic factors on rural Alaskan youth's educational aspirations and expectations. Because of a military-supported economy, Adak was a typical middle class American suburb. Its high school program was primarily academic, between 50-60% of its graduates attended college, and the high school dropout rate was only 1-5%. Fishing and seafood processing were the major sources of income in Unalaska and Dillingham. About half of Unalaska's population were Alaskan Natives. The Unalaska-Dillingham dropout rate was high, and chances for education beyond high school were almost nonexistent. Study results indicated that emphasis on academic preparation and further educational opportunities provided higher educational expectations for Adak youth, whereas lack of incentives for additional schooling severely limited the Unalaska-Dillingham youths' expectations. Those who were not ethnic minorities responded like those from Adak with medium levels of aspiration and expectation, whereas Alaskan Natives responded like those from Dillingham-Unalaska with low levels of aspiration and expectation. Alaskan Natives showed a much lower educational expectation and aspiration than any other ethnic group ever reported. No sex differences were found. (CM)

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Rural Alaskan High School Boys' and Girls' Attitudes Toward Education

The current literature contains very few empirical studies which investigated rural Alaskan youth's attitudes toward education. In a series of studies conducted between 1969-73, reporting the characteristics and attitudes of Alaskan Native high school dropouts (Elias, 1971; Hanks, 1972; Hatch, 1972), it was suggested that the high dropout rate might be due more to the lack of assistance, guidance and social support in school, rather than a dislike for school. In fact, the dropouts placed high value on education and expressed interest in school. Even among the 1969-70 dropouts who were more inclined to cite "not liking school" as the reason for leaving school, they also indicated that they planned to return to school. These studies revealed that these high school dropouts among Alaskan Natives valued education, a norm reflected in the dominant society, but found it difficult for themselves to fulfill such expectation in their immediate socio-cultural environment.

In Merton's study of social structure and anomie inculation (1957), he proposes that educational goals are defined by the society, and cut across cultural differentiation. Kuvlesky and Bealer (1966), on the other hand, contend that aspiration is only one factor among the array of factors that relate to goal attainment; the orientation toward a goal may vary according to the difficulty of attainment. Thus, Kuvlesky and Bealer differentiated between educational aspiration and educational expectation as two separate concepts. The individual's educational aspiration refers to the desired goal in educational attainment, whereas expectation refers to the estimation

of one's probable attainment in reference to that particular goal. One's expectation and aspiration may or may not be the same, depending on one's estimated chance of obtaining one's aspired goal. The difference between aspiration and expectation is the anticipatory goal deflection, the gap between what one would like to be and what one can realistically expect to be.

There have been more than 400 studies which investigated educational aspiration, expectation, anticipatory goal deflection, and the socio-cultural factors that may be related to them. Most of these studies found high and similar aspirations among youth of all ethnic groups, a finding which supports Merton's thesis that aspirations are shaped by common social norms. On the other hand, expectations are more likely to be affected by the specific socio-cultural conditions as proposed by Kuvelsky and Bealer. For example, Jurez found that both male and female Mexican American youth living in low income rural areas of Texas patterned inculcation of high aspiration which differed little from that of the Anglo youth. Kuvlesky's (1969) study on Texas youth found Mexican Americans with lower expectations than their Anglo counterparts. Pelham's (1965) study of white and black male youth in Texas and Georgia demonstrated similar aspirations between races, and inconsistancy in anticipated goals between them. Lever (1969) studied socioeconomic status as another correlate to goal expectation and aspiration. He found that when socioeconomic status was not statistically controlled, the majority of the respondents had high expectations and aspirations when controlled, moderate and positive correlations between socioeconomic status, aspiration and expectation appeared.

Fewer studies attempted to examine American (Canadian) Indians', or Alaskan Natives', goal expectations and aspirations, and the available results tended

to be inconclusive. Stout (1976) compared female and male black, white and Navajo Indian youth, and found that Navajos compared "favorably" with the blacks and whites in terms of educational expectation, aspiration and anticipatory goal deflection. Other studies, such as ones by Elliot (1970), and by Larson (1971) were inconclusive in drawing meaningful comparisons between Indian and non-Indian youths. In general, it appears that although cultural groups differ in overall levels of goal expectation and aspiration, the anticipatory goal deflection is much bigger among different minority youth groups (Edington, Pettibone and Heldt, 1975).

The harsh climate, the geographic isolation, and the spread of the sparse population over a vast land make the entire state of Alaska an extremely rural environment, with the exception of a few cities such as Anchorage, Fairbank and Juneau. In this rural environment, the Alaskan natives are the major residents who, unfortunately, also experience a high dropout rate and low educational attainment. Despite the difficulty of collecting empirical data in such a rural environment, the objective knowledge of the natives' attitudes toward education provides necessary information for educators to design programs and to assist students. The present study intends to examine rural Alaskan youth's educational expectations, aspirations, and the anticipatory goal deflections.

Description of the Sample:

In isolated rural Alaskan villages, fishing and military-government are the two most common economic sources and shape the life style of local communities. The three schools located in three isolated rural Alaska towns, Adak, Unalaska and Dillingham, were thus selected in order to study the effects of those socio-economic factors on rural Alaskan youth's educational aspirations and expectations.

Besides the common denominator of being rural and isolated, Adak differs from the other two towns in its socio-economic background. Adak is an island 1,200 miles west of Anchorage. All 5,000 residents are either in the navy, in civil services for the Department of Defense, providing services for the military, or are their dependents. Most of them are there on a one to two years duty, although quite a few extend their stays. In most aspects, Adak is really a typical middle class American suburb, with amenities, excellent recreation facilities and plenty of well paying civil service jobs. There are 574 K-12 students in the school. The high school program is primarily academic because about 50-60% of the graduates go on to college, and the drop rate is only about 1-5%. The University of Alaska's Adak Extension Center offers a number of college courses here, and about one fourth of the graduating seniors take at least one course from the Center.

Unalaska is an island off Dutch Harbor. Although closer to Anchorage, it is actually more isolated due to the infrequent flights which connects it to the mainland. The permanent population of 1,200 swells to 3,000 or more when the fishing season is going on. Fishing and seafood processing are the major sources of income for local people. The city, the processing plant, and fishing boats hire almost anyone willing to work, and the high school students can work almost anytime and anywhere they want. About half of the population are Alaskan Natives (Aluti ns). Housing is extemely poor, and there are no recreational facilities to speak of in the island. Not one high school student graduate has ever gone to college. The high school dropout rate is high. Students have little incentive to stay in school. There are 279 K-12 students in the school. Dillingham, located on Bristal Bay, is very similar to Unalaska in many aspects. It has 1,699 people, 60% of which are Alaskan Natives. Commercial salmon fishing and fish processing

dominate the local economy. Dillingham School has 380 K-12 students. Chances for further education are almost nonexistent, and youth on Dillingham see no need nor hope for further education.

Description of the Study:

In the winter of 1980, the principals of Adak, Unalaska and Dillingham were approached, and their permissions were given for the study. During the spring of 1981, all the sophomores and seniors in these three schools were given the questionnaire to answer during their English classes which served as home rooms, in order to reach most of the students. The questionnaire used was an adaptation of a status projection instrument developed at Texas A & M University by Kuvlesky. Similar questionnaires have been used by many others such as Stout (1976), Jurez (1968) and Edington et al. (1975) in dealing with educational expectations and aspirations.

In the Adak school, 40 students participated, representing 98% of the total sophomores and seniors. In the Unalaska school, only six participated, and in the Dillingham school, 27 students participated. These 33 students represented 71% of all sophomores and seniors enrolled in these two schools, and all of the sophomores and seniors present during the days when the study was conducted. The researchers were told that the absentee rate was very high in those two schools.

Results:

Of the 73 students who answered the questionnaire, 25 were sophomores, 46 seniors, and two provided no information. Their ages ranged from 14 to 19; most of them were 16 or 18 years old. 31 (42.5%) of them were males and 42 (57.5%) were females. The ethnic compositions were: 23 (31.5%) whites, 5 (6.8%) blacks, 4 (5.5%) Asian Americans, mostly Phillipines, 35 (48%) Alaskan Natives, 1 (1.4%) Chicano, and 5 (6.8%) provided no information.

The distributions of the 73 students' educational aspiration were: 13 (18%) finishing high school, 14 (19%) finishing vocational training, 13 (18%) finishing junior college, 19 (26%) completing university, and 14 (19%) completing graduate study. Their distributions of their educational expectation were: 16 (22%), 15 (21%), 11 (15%), 18 (25%), and 12 (16%) on those same five categories respectively, and 1 (1%) don't know. Most respondents were very confident about the certainty of their expectations, as 25 (34%) reported "very certain," 30 (41%) reported "certain," 13 (18%) "not very certain," and only 5 (7%) reported "uncertain," "very uncertain" or "don't know."

The anticipatory goal deflection is the difference between one's educational aspiration and expectation. The positive values represent the gap between one's goal and one's estimated chance to reach this goal. The negative values represent the expectation that one will reach a higher level of educational attainment than aspired. Among these 73 Alaskan youth, the majority of them (52, 71%) reported that they expected to reach their goal; i.e., no goal deflection, whereas 12 (17%) reported a positive goal deflection, and 9 (12%) reported a negative goal deflection.

A product moment correlation matrix was established for these 73 students in order to determine the correlations between one's educational aspiration, expectation, certainty of one's expectation, one's father's and mother's educational background, breadwinner of the household's occupation and one's anticipatory goal deflection. Positive correlations were found between educational aspiration and expectation ($r = 0.89$, $p < 0.001$), between father's and mother's education ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the higher the occupational status of the father, the more certain the student was about the student's expectation ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$), and the more education the

the father tended to have (r = 0.27, $p < 0.05$). Finally, the anticipatory goal deflection related negatively to the educational expectation (r = 0.36, $p < 0.05$), but did not relate to the educational aspiration (r = 0.09, $p > 0.05$). The other correlations not mentioned were insignificant.

Because of the small sample size, some categories were combined in order to increase the cell size for the chi square analyses. For educational expectation and aspiration, the six original categories as appeared in the questionnaire were combined into three: low (completing high school or vocational training), medium (completing junior college or university), and high (completing graduate study). Only the white and the Alaskan Native were compared; the number of others (black, Chicano, Asian American and no response) was only 15 (20%), and was excluded from the following analyses. Since the Adak school differed significantly from the Unalaska and Dillingham schools in socioeconomic backgrounds, the latter two schools were combined as one for the comparison.

When the boys and girls were compared, no significant sex difference was found in their aspiration (x^2 = 3.53, df = 2, $p > 0.05$), in their expectation (x^2 = 4.09, df = 2, $p > 0.05$), nor in their anticipatory goal deflection (x^2 = 2.36, df = 2, $p > 0.05$). When white and Alaskan Native students were compared, the difference in their expectation was not significant but approaching so (x^2 = 5.38, df = 2, p = 0.06), suggesting a trend in which white students reporting higher levels of educational expectation than Alaskan Native students. A significant difference was found between white and Alaskan Native students' educational expectation (x^2 = 8.17, df = 2, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the white students had higher levels of expectation (see Table 1). When Adak students were compared to Unalaska-Dillingham students, there was no difference in their educational aspiration (x^2 = 1.95,

df = 2, $p > 0.05$); however, a significant difference ($x^2 = 6.57$, df = 2, $p < 0.05$) in their expectation indicating that Adak students had a higher educational expectation than Unalaska-Dillingham students (see Table 2). On anticipatory goal deflection, half of the cells had frequencies of less than 5, thus the chi square analysis would not be valid.

Seniors and sophomores were compared, and no significant difference was found in their aspiration ($x^2 = 0.14$, df = 2, $p > 0.06$), in their expectation ($x^2 = 0.14$, df = 2, $p > 0.05$), or in their anticipatory goal deflection ($x^2 = 1.55$, df = 2, $p > 0.05$).

Comparisons were made on the aspiration and expectation of the white and Alaskan Native students in this study, and those of the Navajo, black and white students in Stout's (1978) study which used identical measurement scales. It seemed that the white students in the present study had a similar and comparable educational expectation and aspiration, whereas the Alaskan Native students had much lower ones, as compared to all groups in Stout's study. Among all four groups, the majority of the students selected medium levels of aspiration and expectation for their goal attainment, whereas among the Alaskan Natives, about half of them selected low levels of educational aspiration and expectations (see Table 1).

Conclusion and Discussion:

Although the sex difference was not found in this study, significant differences in educational aspiration and expectation were found between the white and Alaskan Native youth in rural Alaska, and between youth who lived on a small military town and those who lived on isolated fishing villages. Apparently, the emphasis on the academic preparation and the opportunity for further educational pursuit provided a higher educational expectation for Adak youth, whereas the lack of incentives for additional schooling has

severely limited the Unalaska and Dillingham's youth's expectation. Interestingly, even in such limiting environment as Unalaska and Dillingham, the youth's education aspiration was still somehow comparable to those from the "middle America suburb" of Adak. This finding supports Merton's contention that educational goals tend to be universal, and cut across cultural differentiations. It also attests to Kuvelsky and Bealer's thesis that aspiration and expectation are two separable entities: the aspiration refers to one's desired goal and the expectation reflects one's estimated chance of goal attainment, which is more likely to be affected by one's sociocultural environment.

Similarly, when ethnic groups were compared, those who were not ethnic minorities responded like those from the Adak "middle American suburb" with medium levels of aspiration and expectation, whereas Alaskan Natives responded like those from Dillingham-Unalaska fishing villages with low levels of aspiration and expectation. The Aslaskan Natives showed a lower educational aspiration than Alaskan whites; however, the difference was not statistically significant. On educational expectation, Alaskan Natives were significantly lower as compared to the Alaskan whites, reflecting what Alaskan Natives believed that they could expect to achieve. The most striking difference was found between Alaskan Natives and all the other ethnic groups reported in Stout's study. As reported by Stout, rural Navajos compared favorably to other majority and minority groups in their expectation and aspiration; in fact, all groups were more similar than different in this study. On the contrary, the rural Alaskan Natives in the present study showed a much lower educational expectation and aspiration than any other ethnic groups ever reported. Perhaps the rural Alaska with its severe isolation has made Alaskan Natives the most disadvantaged minority among all ethnic minorities in terms of receiving educational opportunity.

Kuvelsky and Bealer believe that the anticipatory goal deflection should be much bigger among different minority youth groups as compared to majority youth. However, due to the small sample size in this study, the frequencies of many cells were less than 5, which made chi square analyses on ethnic groups' anticipatory goal deflection meaningless. An indirect support to Kuvelsky and Bealer's thesis came from the product moment correlations which indicated that the anticipatory goal deflection related negatively to the educational expectation, but did not relate to the educational aspiration at all. This finding provided an indirect evidence that the aspiration tended to be independent goal deflection and that the expectation was the reciprocal factor affecting the magnitude of the anticipatory goal deflection.

It is also interesting to see that between sophomore to senior years, these educational expectations stayed stable and showed little or no change. Further study is needed to investigate what are the earliest ages when these educational attitudes are taking form and becoming stablized in our youth.

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Table 1

Distribution of Ethnic Groups' Educational Aspiration and Expectation

Aspiration	White (N = 23)	Alaskan Native (N = 35)	*Navajo (N = 377)	*Black (N = 188)	*White (N = 291)
Low	5 22%	17 49%	8%	11.5%	19.5%
Medium	13 57%	10 28%	51%	56.5%	42.5%
High	5 21%	8 23%	41%	32%	38%

Expectation	White	Alaskan Native	*Navajo	*Black	*White
Low	6 26%	19 56%	10%	15%	26%
Medium	14 61%	8 24%	55%	56%	46%
High	3 13%	7 20%	35%	29%	28%

* Data from Stout (1976), p. 64, p. 66, p. 67.

Table 2

Distribution of Adak and Unalaska-Dillingham Students' Educational Aspiration and Expectation

Aspiration	Adak Students (N = 40)	Unalaska-Dillingham Students (N = 33)
Low	12 30%	15 45.5%
Medium	19 47.5%	13 39.4%
High	9 22.5%	5 15.1%

Expectation	Adak Students	Unalaska-Dillingham Students
Low	12 30%	19 59.4%
Medium	19 47.5%	10 31.3%
High	9 22.5%	3 9.3%